**Poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko**

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

[Alexander Litvinenko](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Litvinenko) was a former officer of the [Russian Federal Security Service](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_Security_Service_(Russia)), FSB and KGB, who escaped prosecution in Russia and received [political asylum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_asylum) in the [United Kingdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom). He wrote two books, [*Blowing up Russia: Terror from within*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blowing_up_Russia:_Terror_from_within) and [*Lubyanka Criminal Group*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lubyanka_Criminal_Group), where he accused the Russian secret services of staging [Russian apartment bombings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_apartment_bombings) and [other terrorism acts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allegations_of_state_terrorism_by_Russia) to bring [Vladimir Putin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Putin) to power.

On 1 November 2006, Litvinenko suddenly fell ill and was hospitalized. He died three weeks later, becoming the first confirmed victim of lethal [polonium-210](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polonium)-induced [acute radiation syndrome](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radiation_poisoning). According to doctors, "Litvinenko's murder represents an ominous landmark: the beginning of an era of [nuclear terrorism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_terrorism)".

Litvinenko's allegations about the misdeeds of the FSB and his public deathbed accusations that Russian president Vladimir Putin were behind his unusual malady resulted in worldwide media coverage.

**Radioactive Smoke: A Dangerous Isotope Lurks in Cigarettes**

**The tobacco industry has known for decades how to remove a dangerous isotope from cigarettes but has done nothing about it. The government now has the power to force a change**

In November 2006 former KGB operative Alexander Litvinenko died in a London hospital in what had all the hallmarks of a cold war–style assassination. Despite the intrigue surrounding Litvinenko’s death, the poison that killed him, a rare radioactive isotope called polonium 210, is far more widespread than many of us realize: people worldwide smoke almost six trillion cigarettes a year, and each one delivers a small amount of polonium 210 to the lungs. Puff by puff, the poison builds up to the equivalent radiation dosage of 300 chest x-rays a year for a person who smokes one and a half packs a day.

Although polonium may not be the primary carcinogen in cigarette smoke, it may nonetheless cause thousands of deaths a year in the U.S. alone. And what sets polonium apart is that these deaths could be avoided with simple measures. The tobacco industry has known about polonium in cigarettes for nearly 50 years. By searching through internal tobacco industry documents, I have discovered that manufacturers even devised processes that would dramatically cut down the isotope’s concentrations in cigarette smoke. But Big Tobacco consciously decided to do nothing and to keep its research secret. In consequence, cigarettes still contain as much polonium today as they did half a century ago.